KAPPAN

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Reaching Out To AMERICA'S DROPOUTS

Mortimer Adler on the Constitution
Ralph Tyler on School Reform

A Clear and Present Danger

THE LATEST exercise in the pursuit of trivial knowledge is the new parlor game of identifying the entries in E.D. Hirsch's infamous list: 60-odd pages of names, dates, titles, and other scraps of information that form the appendix of *Cultural Literacy*. These are purportedly things that "literate Americans" know. It's a great game. Let's play.

All of us recognize the title of this editorial, don't we? Well, sure. It's from . . . wait, don't tell me. . . . Come on, it's on Hirsch's list, and we're all culturally literate.

I confess to having chosen an example that I knew, so I wouldn't feel uneasy waving it around like this, but I must also confess that I had to look up the date of the Supreme Court decision it comes from. The phrase was written by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes in *Schenk* v. *United States* (1919), and it is a part of Holmes' efforts to define the Constitutional limits of free speech.

But never mind. *Identifying* such a phrase – or date or name or title – may be sufficient for conducting everyday affairs, but it is entirely different from *understanding* what such bits of information mean in context, how they came about, what they imply about us as human beings or as citizens of a nation. Understanding is what counts – and it's a commodity that's distressingly scarce today.

Only a hermit doesn't know by now that 1987 is the bicentennial year of the signing of the U.S. Constitution, and this issue of the *Kappan* includes excerpts from Mortimer Adler's new book, *We Hold These Truths*, in which he celebrates the 200th anniversary of the "conception," not the "birth," of the United States. The gestation period can be said to have lasted at least until March of 1789, when George Washington was inaugurated.

Adler's aim in his book is every bit as educational as Hirsch's. But Adler seeks to stimulate education of a substantially different – and to my mind more important – kind. From his experience with high school students in Paideia seminars, Adler has arrived at the dismal conclusion that their understanding of the meaning of the principal terms in the documents on which this nation is founded do not reach "the minimal requisite for citizenship in this country." Lest readers jump to the ill-founded conclusion that Adler is just another school critic who revels in cudgeling students for their shortcomings, I should point out that Adler also indicts the opinion leaders in Aspen Institute seminars and even President Kennedy's staff for deficiencies in their understanding. Had he known us, I'm sure his disapproval would have extended to many readers of this magazine – including (until I read his book and reread the documents appended to it) me.

But he offers a way out of our slough of ignorance, and it's not memorizing a list of signers of the Constitution. It is accepting our duty as citizens, which makes you and me the rulers and elected and appointed officials our servants. "The personal obligation of every citizen of the United States," Adler charges us, "is to understand . . . the documents that are the American testament. . . ."

Had I been Adler's editor, I would have italicized the word *understand*. For the "clear and present danger" we all face today is that, through our own indolence, we will be satisfied with knowing only the bare facts and strutting the trappings of our knowledge in parlor games, even as we abdicate our responsibilities as citizens and let others shape the future of our nation. – BMS

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Cover Photo: Dick Spahr

terns that suggest that educational justice is not being well served.

The barriers between city and suburbs have been breached by the long-running Metco Program, under which 3,456 minority students from Boston and Springfield currently attend nearly 200 schools in 37 suburban communities. This program has not only increased opportunity for minority students, but it has also created true common schools in exclusive suburbs. Thus the town of Lincoln, one of the wealthiest in the state, serves an enrollment that is 15% black. The state has funded the costs of the Metco Program for 20 years, appropriating more than $10 million during the past year alone for the costs of instruction, transportation, and extensive support services for urban students in suburban schools.

Parents and educators in more than a dozen Massachusetts cities have seen a similar vision, a vision of a freely chosen common school bringing together a racially and economically diverse student body to learn together and from one another. Some 47,000 students now attend 80 urban magnet schools in Massachusetts, and there should be 100 such schools by next year. The state currently appropriates more than $14 million a year in grants to magnet and other desegregated schools, and millions more are distributed through construction and transportation reimbursements.

Nor is the vision of a new common school limited to bringing together minority and white students or urban and suburban students. The new common school has an educational mission as well. This comes across most clearly in the growing number of "two-way bilingual" schools, in which Hispanic and non-Hispanic students share not only a building but an educational goal. Each group seeks to learn the other's language, and, in doing so, each group learns respect as well. Many voices have raised the possibility that different languages will divide us as a nation. But in these new common schools, it is language itself that unites students who come from very different backgrounds.

These schools, created by thousands of Massachusetts educators, parents, and students, only begin to tap the possibilities offered by the new vision of the common school. The people of every state and of every school district must join in the effort to design common schools for their own community and its special set of needs. K

Differences Between Educators and the Public on Questions Of Education Policy

Educators and the general public differ markedly on a number of important issues regarding education. Mr. Elam analyzes the responses of these two groups to the questions posed by the Gallup Organization and suggests some dilemmas that their responses pose for policy makers.

BY STANLEY M. ELAM

THE OPINIONS of professional educators, as represented by a sample of the membership of Phi Delta Kappa, differ from those of the general public on a number of important education policy questions and related matters. These differences will be a continuing source of friction between the education community and the public it serves, unless and until means can be found for reconciling them. At the very least, the differences suggest an agenda for the public relations arm of the education profession.

These are among the conclusions that stem from an examination of responses of PDK members to a poll conducted by mail last April.* The poll questions were the same as those asked by Gallup Organization interviewers for the annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools. The public's responses to these questions were reported in the September 1987 *Kappan* by Alec Gallup and David Clark under the title, "The 19th Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools."

The major opinion differences uncovered between the general public and professional educators included the following.

STANLEY M. ELAM (Indiana University Chapter) is Kappan *contributing editor and poll coordinator for Phi Delta Kappa. He served from 1956 until his retirement in 1980 as editor of the* Kappan *and director of PDK publications.* *Copies of "A Study of the Opinions of Phi Delta Kappa Members on Gallup Education Poll Questions, 1987," a 32-page report prepared by the Indiana University Survey Research Center, can be obtained for $10 each by writing to Publications, Phi Delta Kappa, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789. The price includes shipping.*

*A randomly selected sample of the approximately 123,000 Phi Delta Kappans living in the United States was asked to complete and return a questionnaire. Of the 1,800 mailed, 730 questionnaires were returned by May 15, the deadline given. This is a response rate of 41%. No effort was made to sample nonrespondents, because there was no evidence of persistent bias. The distribution of responses by sex, age, education, race, community size, state of residence, and primary occupation (among 19 categories) paralleled that of the general membership. There were also no significant differences between 58 responses received after the May 15 cutoff and those received earlier.

• Asked to identify the biggest problems in their local schools, the general public most often mentioned abuse of drugs (30%), lack of discipline (22%), and lack of proper financial support (14%). In the eyes of professional educators, the top problems in their local schools were inadequate finances (60%); student behavioral problems (54.5%), including drug abuse (14%); and parents' lack of interest (18%).

• Nearly twice as many professional educators as members of the general public (48% to 27%) reported that their local public schools have improved over the past five years.

• Professional educators tended to give the public schools in their communities higher grades than did the public. For example, 43% of the general public awarded their local schools a grade of A or B, as did 56% of the parents of public school children and 69% of professional educators.*

• Professional educators did not seem convinced, as the public definitely was, of the value of reporting the results of student achievement tests on a state-by-state and school-by-school basis in order to compare schools of similar size and of similar racial and economic makeup. The public favored the idea (70% for and 14% against), whereas professional educators were equally divided (47% for and 47% against).

• Professional educators opposed the voucher system (74% to 21.5%), whereas the public was about equally divided (44% for and 41% against). A majority of both the public and professional educators believed vouchers would hurt the public schools in their communities, but professional educators were much more certain of this.

• Like the public, professional educators tended to oppose a strong decision-making role for the federal government in public education. However, nearly twice as many professional educators as members of the public (68% to 37%) said that they would maintain the existing federal Department of Education instead of giving its functions to a smaller agency or to other departments.

• Fewer than half as many professional educators as members of the public (31% to 68%) favored an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would allow organized prayer in the public schools.

• The public was considerably more inclined than professional educators to favor giving parents more say about the public school curriculum, books, and instructional materials.

Specific differences on curriculum matters were revealed by several questions. For example:

• While 43% of the public thought that courses on values and ethical behavior should be taught in public schools, only 21% of professional educators agreed. Professionals were much more likely than members of the public (43% to 13%) to consider moral education a joint responsibility of schools, parents, and churches.

• Far more professional educators than members of the public would require health education, physical education, foreign languages, music, and art for high school students who plan to go to college.

• Many more professional educators than members of the public favored sex education in the public schools, both secondary (professionals 93% for, public 76% for) and elementary (professionals 88% for, public 55% for).

• More professional educators than members of the public favored computer training for all high school students.

IT WOULD be easy to overemphasize the differences between professional and public opinion on education questions. Some of the differences are small or insignificant. For example:

• Both professionals and the public overwhelmingly believe that raising standards of academic achievement would help the quality of public schools in their communities.

	Professionals %	Public %
Would improve quality	78	76
Would hurt quality	13	11
Don't know/ no answer	9	13

• Professionals and the public agree that requiring more basics, such as math and science, thus reducing the number of elective courses students can take, would improve the quality of the public schools in their communities. (But note some differences in percentages.)

	Professionals %	Public %
Would improve quality	65	75
Would hurt quality	26	11
Don't know/ no answer	9	14

• Professionals and the public tend to agree on what divisions of government should have the greatest influence on improving local public schools, though the public seems to fear state and federal influence somewhat less than professionals do.

Federal Government	Professionals %	Public %
Favor more influence	24	37
Favor less influence	50	39
Favor same influence	23	14
Don't know/ no answer	3	10

State Government	Professionals %	Public %
Favor more influence	41	55
Favor less influence	35	21
Favor same influence	23	15
Don't know/ no answer	1	9

Local Government	Professionals %	Public %
Favor more influence	48	62
Favor less influence	23	15
Favor same influence	27	15
Don't know/ no answer	2	8

• Professionals and the public agree that it would be possible to develop subject matter for character education courses that would be acceptable to most of the people in their communities, and these majorities tend to believe that, if students or their parents object to the courses, students should be excused from taking them.

	Professionals %	Public %
Possible to develop acceptable courses	70	62

*It should perhaps be noted that a disproportionately large number of Phi Delta Kappa members live in communities served by America's more fortunate schools.

	Professionals %	Public %
Not possible	22	23
Don't know/ no answer	8	15

	Professionals %	Public %
Yes, excuse objectors	64	52
No, don't excuse	26	37
Don't know/ no answer	10	11

• With minor exceptions, the public and the profession agree on what the *core* courses should be for both college-bound and non-college-bound high school students.

	College-Bound Professionals %	College-Bound Public %
Mathematics	92	94
English	99	91
History/U.S. government	99	84
Science	99	83
Foreign language	76	56

	Non-College-Bound Professionals %	Non-College-Bound Public %
Mathematics	98.5	88
English	98	85
History/U.S. government	97	69
Science	91	57
Foreign language	18.5	20

There are large areas of agreement – and some notable disagreements – on a question that attempted to find out what people think the federal government should do for American education.

Eleven services that the federal government has performed – sometimes vigorously, sometimes reluctantly – were listed. Respondents were asked to indicate whether these were things they thought the federal government should do. The results are shown in Table 1.

Note the strong disagreement between professionals and the general public on whether the federal government should support a national testing program and on whether the federal government should require states and local schools to meet minimum educational standards.

Obviously, it is the areas of disagreement between the public and the profession that should most concern both groups. What accounts for the differences? Do they arise from public ignorance of the facts and the logic behind professional opinions? (Public respondents admitted to Gallup interviewers that they know little of some of the issues raised.) From public indifference? Is immediate self-interest more important to some educators than the success in school of their students? Are most of the differences of opinion reconcilable if both parties make the effort?

My purpose in presenting the data in this article is to raise these questions, not attempt to answer them. Educators in leadership positions should ponder the dilemmas they pose. K

TABLE 1.
Services That the Federal Government Should Perform

	Yes		No		Don't Know	
	Professionals %	Public %	Professionals %	Public %	Professionals %	Public %
Advise and encourage state and local education systems to deal with important national problems in education, such as illiteracy, poor math achievement, and the like	83	83	14	10	3	7
Identify important national problems in education, such as illiteracy, poor math achievement, and the like	81	81	15.5	12	4	7
Collect and report information and statistics that measure the performance of education in the nation	80	73	16	18	4	9
Fund research and development in areas of need, such as the curriculum and teaching methods	77.5	72	18.5	19	4	9
Fund programs to deal with important national problems in education, such as illiteracy, poor math achievement, and the like	73	78	22	15	5	7
Provide financing for scholarships and fellowships for college students	70	72	24	20	6	8
Provide recognition and awards for high achievement by students, teachers, and schools	68.5	76	27	17	5	7
Promote educational programs intended to help solve such social problems as poverty and unequal opportunities for minorities, women, and the handicapped	67	80	22	12	6	8
Require states and local school districts to meet minimum educational standards	53	84	43	10	4	6
Provide financial aid to the states through block grants that can be used for education or for any other purpose	50.5	57	43	30	6	13
Support a national testing program for public school students	31	74	63	17	6	9